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Strategic Plan 2012-2016

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INSIGHT.

CENTER FOR COMMUNITY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Five Year Strategic Plan: 2012-2016

Introduction

In the five years since the Insight Center for Community Economic Development embarked on its last Strategic Plan, the world has changed. So have we.

As we enter our 43rd year, the Insight Center adopts this new Strategic Plan in recognition that American communities are in the midst of wrenching economic change. This reality requires new responses to the current crisis, as well as new strategies to prepare for a future in which the search for economic security may prove more challenging than ever.

Success will demand innovation in our thinking, foresight in our planning, and agility in our methods and actions. The Insight Center is well equipped to meet these challenges, with a strong track record of linking analysis with action and theory with practice. Many of Insight Center's programs and initiatives – in workforce development, early care and education, and wealth building – continue to be successful. This Plan retains those while also adjusting our focus to adapt to short term and long-term threats within a changing economy.

The Current Challenge

The challenges created by the economic calamities of the past three years remain formidable.

The collapse of the housing market wiped out a generation of homeowner wealth and unleashed a foreclosure crisis that has yet to wind down. The near-collapse of the banking system brought business investment to a virtual standstill, casting some 14 million American workers into unemployment, plus millions more who are undocumented. Structural economic conditions have enabled growing extremes of wealth and poverty, pooling vast amounts of economic and political power in the hands of a few and contributing to a dangerous paralysis in government.

The outsourcing of work continues. As demand in the labor force tilts toward individuals with high technical skills, many American public schools remain mired in mediocrity, turning out millions of young people unprepared to compete in the 21st century global economy.

Demographic shifts afoot also foretell lasting change. In 2011, for the first time, more than half the children born in the U.S. were of a racial or ethnic minority. Over the next three decades these young African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans will become a majority, populating the nation's schools, plants and offices. At the same time, the economic gap between whites and non-whites continues to widen: these racial and ethnic minority groups are significantly more likely to be economically insecure and have difficulty meeting their daily living needs; they are increasingly less likely to own homes or savings. By 2050, the workforce will be majority people of color, and the U.S. economy will depend on the training and skills of this new class of leaders and workers.

The way political change happens has also changed. Large corporations have amassed huge sums of capital and have more political rights than in the past, allowing them to wield growing political influence.

Yet despite these challenges, the Insight Center believes that the changes we desire are within reach. Communities can thrive by strategically adapting to the changing matrix of local and global forces they face. Non-profit, government and private sector actors can create impact by collectively deploying their substantial expertise and resources. The Insight Center is prepared to lead, but we maintain that the only way for communities to become and remain economically secure is within an economy that is more inclusive and sustainable.

Our History

The Insight Center for Community Economic Development was born in 1969, originally as the National Housing and Economic Development Law Project and later as the National Economic Development and Law Center. In 2007 we changed our name to the Insight Center for Community Economic Development to better reflect the role we seek to play in the community economic development field.

Throughout our history, we have developed and tested new models and approaches, often locally, and then promoted the promising ones nationally as the best practices in the

field.

The Insight Center was the first national organization to offer a comprehensive and coherent approach to Community Economic Development, helping to create housing, jobs, health care facilities, and businesses. We led the way in establishing the legal precedents for business and real estate development by charitable corporations, and wrote the first comprehensive legal treatise on the subject. In our first 15 years, the Insight Center supported the creation of more than 500 community-based development corporations around the country.

During the next 27 years, the Insight Center has pioneered new approaches in workforce development, becoming the first proponent of sector-based strategies; in early care and education, becoming the first organization to demonstrate the economic importance of childcare and more recently, in asset building, leading a national effort to close the racial wealth gap for the next generation.

The Last Five Years: Our Successes and Accomplishments

In the five years since we prepared our last strategic plan, the Insight Center can cite progress across many fronts.

Closing the Racial Wealth Gap (CRWG), an organization-wide initiative that links analysis and advocacy to The Experts of Color Network, a nationwide clearinghouse of 175 academics and other thought leaders, continues to grow rapidly.

Building Economic Security for All (BESA) was launched as a local initiative to help California families achieve economic security but has grown into a multi-state project and spun off additional initiatives focused on elder security, self-sufficiency and the creation of improved methods of measuring poverty.

As the creator of the National Network of Sector Partners (NNSP), the Insight Center remains a leader in aligning workforce, economic development, education, and social service systems. Thousands of job seekers and workers, including many facing barriers in employment, have moved toward economic security through the best practice of sector initiatives.

Our Inclusive Business Initiative conducted a comprehensive scan which resulted in a website that is the only source of in-depth information on women/minority owned businesses for each state and the District of Columbia.

We have increased support for early care and education programs across the country, conducting more than 30 studies which demonstrate the importance of early care and education to the local or regional economy.

Among our other accomplishments, we have expanded and strengthened our statewide legal services presence with the addition of an attorney in Los Angeles and revival of the Southern California legal services practitioners working group. We have also co-edited a comprehensive book, *Building Healthy Communities: A Guide to Community Economic Development for Advocates, Lawyers, and Policymakers* published by the American Bar Association and used nationally by law schools and community development organizations.

Part I: Current Strategic Responses

Our Vision

We believe that the pathway to sustainable growth for our country and its people lies in strengthening our most vulnerable and economically detached populations.

The Insight Center envisions a nation where all people have access to the resources, opportunities and support they need to help them realize their potential and achieve economic security. We envision a nation of individuals and families with sufficient income, quality education, decent and affordable housing and health care, a safe environment, and savings and other economic assets. We see a society that recognizes the value, dignity and creative potential of the overlooked and underappreciated. Success on this scale will make us all richer and is the moral thing to do, consistent with the values of our democracy.

The most compelling argument for investing in vulnerable people and communities is an economic one: greater levels of inclusion will increase individual, community and national productivity. Greater inclusion creates a virtuous cycle whereby economically healthy communities attract entrepreneurs and other employers who provide good wages to well-educated workers. In turn, those workers are able to attain economic security and reinvest in the continuing improvement of their schools and neighborhoods.



Our Mission

The Insight Center's mission is to help people and communities become, and remain, economically secure.

Our Guiding Values

Our work is guided by the following values:

- **Inclusiveness**
We believe everyone should be valued in our society and everyone should have the opportunity to participate and enjoy the benefits of our economic system.
- **Respect**
We believe in a society and workplace in which all people are treated fairly and are provided with the tools to prosper. Exchanges of opinion should always be collegial and constructive and exhibit respect and tolerance for differing views.
- **Collaboration**
We believe complex economic challenges faced by vulnerable communities require multi-disciplinary and integrated solutions. These solutions are best realized through collaborations between the private sector, government, non-profit organizations and the affected communities and their people.
- **Integrity**
We believe we should investigate topics rigorously, base conclusions on demonstrable evidence, and communicate findings clearly and honestly.

Who We Serve

For a growing number of Americans under economic pressure, public policy is not responsive to their needs. Traditional economic policies and solutions can make a difference in the lives and circumstances of individuals and communities. But we believe that those policies often remain blind to the value of large numbers of people who wind up sidelined, or whose skills are squandered.

While many see economically distressed people as liabilities and outcasts in a marketplace based on merit and choice, we see something very different. We see the overlooked as valued human capital and potential assets whose productivity and economic growth is critical to boosting the economies of local communities and the nation. We identify specific vulnerable populations and communities who lack sufficient income and/or assets to be economically secure. We remove the barriers preventing them from achieving and maintaining that security. We use a lens of race, age and/or gender to identify and engage these populations.

We are especially concerned with today's children and those yet to be born, and the families and environment in which they live. We are guided by our belief that we should

take whatever actions we can today to help them become economically secure as adults.

Although our work is focused on those vulnerable people and communities who are economically insecure, measuring who is economically vulnerable isn't always clear. Our definition of economically insecure is broader than traditional measures. Poverty reduction programs employ outdated yardsticks to determine who qualifies for assistance and how much state and federal funding is allocated to local communities.

The Federal Poverty Guidelines, and the newer Supplemental Poverty Measure, for example, only capture about 30% of those who actually need assistance. This is because the decades-old federal standard does not account for rapidly increasing costs such as health care or "new" costs such as childcare or elder care; nor does it reflect local differences in the cost of basic goods and services.

As a result, millions of working Americans who are economically distressed are not considered "poor" by government standards and therefore do not receive the support they need. We believe new analytical tools are needed. Families, policymakers, foundations, service providers, and advocates remain challenged to reach the ultimate goal of economic security without having more accurate and accepted tools by which to measure economic vulnerability.

Part II: Implementation

How We Work

The Insight Center recognizes that successful communities do not define themselves negatively -- that is, in terms of weaknesses and needs, but rather that they define themselves positively -- by their strengths, capabilities and assets. We believe this way of thinking is the foundation of any successful community development strategy.

We build on this foundation in multiple ways, including: identifying and supporting economically productive community assets such as high quality early childhood education; tailoring education and job-training policies and programs to align worker skills with the sectors that need them; advocating for policies that encourage wealth building through removal of structural impediments; assembling networks of experts who recognize the value of both an income and asset-based perspective and can influence opinion and legislative action; and directly engaging the untapped human capital that has been bottled up, neglected or simply overlooked.

Methods

Networked and Collaborative Leadership:

We endeavor to engage in a collaborative leadership style which allows us to build and participate in collaborative networks, benefit from the knowledge and experience of others, share resources with appropriate partners, disseminate messages more widely, and benefit from other synergies that result from being part of a larger movement toward economic security.

Concentric Impact Approach:

We employ a multi-layered concentric impact approach to insure that our problem-solving analysis corresponds to the reality of the lives of families and communities. We link tested local practice, informed program design, economic impact of policy and socio-economic analysis into a flexible and responsive system.



Our approach advances along five main pathways:

Research and Analysis

- Research and Analysis enable us to understand technical problems and develop innovative, authoritative policy and programmatic solutions.

Communications

- Communications raises Insight's public visibility and enables us to broaden the impact of our ideas through multiple media.

Advocacy

- Advocacy allows us to leverage our view in public forums likely to lead to substantive change in policy and opinion such as municipal, state and national legislative and administrative bodies, and among private stakeholders.

Building Networks and Infrastructure

- Building Networks and Infrastructure is a critical pathway in which we create learning communities and advocacy coalitions consisting of organizers and practitioners as well as networks of scholars.

Capacity-Building

- Capacity Building describes the Insight Center's engagement with community-based organizations

and other clients and partners, in which we provide research, technical assistance, and other tools. We leave people and communities stronger.

Levers of Change: Income, Assets and Wealth

The intersection of income, assets and wealth is often overlooked in conventional analysis, yet we recognize it as vital to the long-term systemic change we desire, and vital to policies and programs as vulnerable workers make their climb up the economic ladder. We acknowledge that changes in individual behavior are often necessary for individuals and families to attain and maintain economic security, however, such changes in individual behavior alone are insufficient. Our goal is to remove those systemic and institutional barriers that create or maintain economic insecurity.

Attaining economic security and wealth rests on building and maintaining two interconnected pillars: income and assets. Income allows people to become economically secure; economic assets allow them to remain economically secure, and importantly, to pass the benefits of this stability on to their offspring.

For the vast majority of families, income without assets leaves them in a state of chronic vulnerability, with little or no cushion in the event of loss of that income. Families possessing assets without income often find themselves on eroding ground and facing limited opportunities for their children. But together, income and assets are the keys to unlocking the chain of intergenerational economic insecurity, presenting the greatest promise of systemic change producing stable communities.

Both income and assets play mutually supporting roles in maintaining economic security.

The Insight Center fully recognizes as well that income is often an important link to further economic opportunity, and that non-economic assets also play a critical role in achieving stability on a community level.



Our Priorities: The Next Five Years

The Insight Center staff and the Board of Directors have established economic security and equity- building priorities for the next five years. As noted earlier, the ongoing jobs crisis, the widening wealth gap, and the poorly performing public educational system threaten American productivity in both the short and the long term.

Desired Outcomes

To address these issues, we have decided on three main desired outcomes for our work at the end of five years.

- Public recognition that there are far more economically vulnerable people than our current official measures identify, and an increased political will to address that reality.
- Major public and private policies and programs are guided by the principle that they will be designed and implemented to be inclusive of all people and their needs, especially racial and ethnic minorities.
- Advancement of at least one major proposal which more equitably distributes this country's economic assets and resources among its people.

The Insight Center will achieve these outcomes in two primary ways: by focusing on short-term improvements and long-term structural change, both from a substantive perspective as well as the process for achieving substantive change. We will measure the results of our efforts by creating an outcome-based evaluation program.

The Insight Center's plan is to increase our commitment to the continuum of policies and programs around Income and Asset strategies. These inter-related policies will be mutually reinforcing. In addition to continuing to build out successful programs such as Closing the Racial Wealth Gap (CRWG), National Network of Sector Partners (NNSP), and Building Economic Security for All (BESA), we will pursue the following process and substantive strategies:

Process Strategies

Growing the Movement

Grow and strengthen the movement to achieve economic security and equity for all.

Build greater unity and inclusion within the economic security movement by uniting a fragmented field and diverse stakeholders around a common policy agenda and vision of economic security for all, particularly people of color and women.

- Develop and support national and statewide networks to promote effective income and asset building practices and policies that move people toward economic security and reduce the racial wealth gap
- Promote the adoption of a racial and ethnic lens by asset-building organizations.

Engaging Policymakers and the Public

Change the public and policy discourse to focus on economic security and equity for all.

- Educate policymakers and the public about what it means to be economically secure.
- Collaborate with policy partners and academics to create common principles for official standards of economic security.
- Educate policy makers and the public about policies and programs that build economic security and equity for diverse populations.

Substantive Strategies

Promoting Economic Security

Promote policies and practices that allow everyone, at all stages of life, to fully contribute to and benefit from our economic system, especially people of color, immigrants, and women.

- Promote the adoption of measures of economic security that measure the true cost of economic security.
- Support innovative community practices that build community assets and help communities thrive.
- Protect and expand the economic safety net.

Inclusion of All

- Develop and demonstrate effective workforce and economic development strategies and policies for specific populations and replicate them nationally.
- Promote policies and practices to increase investment and opportunities for micro-enterprise and women- and minority-owned businesses.
- Promote solutions to building economic security and equity that are guided by and respectful of the views and cultures of diverse populations.

Promoting Economic Equity

- Promote specific income and asset policies and practices that increase the equitable distribution of income and assets.
- Develop and promote methods to evaluate the economic effect of policies and programs on specific populations.
- Develop policies and practices that enable communities of color to build and keep wealth over a lifetime.

